

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In its *Third Report to Congress*, the Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress sharpens discussion of three critical areas: the preservation of members' papers, the development and preservation of electronic records in Congress, and research access to congressional archival information. While the first two reports focused on developing the official records of Congress at the Center for Legislative Archives at the National Archives, this report turns to issues associated with preserving members' papers—the other major source of information about Congress. The first chapter presents the results of a national survey and a case study that illuminate and define these issues. A second case study provides an example of possible solutions. Recommendations and preservation criteria are derived from these examples.

Technology's impact on congressional documentation during the past five years has been phenomenal and promises to be every bit as important over the next five years. Chapter II describes projects at the National Archives and in the Congress that are designed to ensure the preservation of electronic records for the long term, through changes in hardware and software. A combination of technological breakthroughs and the efficiencies that flow from them have created opportunities to improve access to information about Congress. The results of the National Archives' Electronic Records Archives program promise a scalable technology that will help both larger and smaller congressional archives meet the technical and financial challenges associated with electronic records. This is especially important because records documenting the work of Congress, unlike the records of a presidential administration, do not physically reside in one convenient library. Chapter VI describes improvements in access and underscores the need to continue to explore ways to expand them. The remaining chapters detail progress in areas outlined in the first two reports. Chapter VIII summarizes their status.

Looking back over nearly a decade since it was established, the Advisory Committee notes substantial progress in the following areas:

- establishing a strongly staffed Center for Legislative Archives and initiating the renovation of the Center's facilities

- establishing better archival, administrative and intellectual controls over the records of congressional committees and other entities, including the House Republican Caucus, the Senate Republican Policy Committee, Senate Republican Conference, the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, and congressional commissions
- improving committee records management guidance through timely publications and seminars
- improving members' office records management guidance through effective publications and briefings
- initiating cooperative activities between the Center and the membership of the Congressional Papers Roundtable of the Society of American Archivists in order to strengthen preservation of the documentation of Congress
- establishing records schedules for congressional support agencies, including the Congressional Budget Office, General Accounting Office, Government Printing Office, and Office of Technology Assessment
- establishing a strong preservation/conservation program for the Center's archival holdings and the Charters of Freedom
- initiating a program of electronic records management and preservation
- improving access to congressional archives by initiating (1) the publication of on-line finding aids and committee resource guides, (2) textual and on-line publication of significant documents, (3) the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress data base as well as declassifying previously classified records
- establishing educational resources and exhibits using the archival holdings of the Center

While much has been accomplished, there is still much to do to achieve the ideal goal of preserving a complete and useful archival record of Congress.

Members' Papers constitute at least half of the documentation of Congress. They are maintained and preserved by hundreds of different repositories around the country. The process whereby these records are collected and preserved needs to be strengthened. Because of their size and complexity, they have increasingly become a strain on the resources of recipient institutions. This report provides valuable information about such costs so that members can take appropriate steps to help mitigate them and work with their institutions to raise any necessary funds.

Committee records also are increasingly voluminous and complex. While much progress has been made in the form of guidelines

and seminars, there is a need on many committees for professional archival expertise on a daily basis. The increasing frequency of committee staff turnover and the proliferation of electronic records pose record-keeping challenges that can best be managed by a full-time staff archivist.

Electronic records preservation remains a top priority. Working with the National Archives, Congress must continue to support the development of national standards that will facilitate the long-term preservation of electronic records regardless of changes in hardware and software. As more information is generated electronically, Congress must continue to ensure that the record copy of its official documents is clearly identified and preserved in such a manner that it can be accessed long into the future. At the same time, it is vital that electronic formats and data bases be preserved not only because of the amount of money invested in their creation, but because they so greatly enhance access to the information.

To improve and strengthen the management and preservation of members' papers and committee records, the Advisory Committee:

- Endorses the use of preservation criteria by members who wish to donate their papers to a research institution, and recommends that these criteria be made available to grant-making agencies to give them a standard for assessing grant applications they may receive for preserving particular congressional papers collections (Section I.D.)
- Recommends that members of Congress, prior to their retirement or after six years of service, *begin devoting specific and dedicated resources* to strengthen records management and establish preliminary intellectual controls over the records prior to their transfer. *Such resources may range from a staff archivist to arranging for sharing an archivist with other offices.* (Section I.A.)
- Endorses the development of statewide Public Policy Centers that include a strong archival component with a focus on political and public policy documentation. The purpose is to encourage within each state, research facilities that approximate what a presidential library offers in terms of resources and collections that relate to each other. Centralizing similar collections at dedicated repositories will make it possible to share the extensive resources needed to preserve such materials. The collections will also be more accessible to scholars who will need to visit only one or two places as opposed to ten or twenty. (Section I.C.)

- Recommends that congressional committees hire professional archivists to assist with records management and archiving projects (Section III.B.)
- Endorses the National Archives' Electronic Records Archives (ERA) program to develop long-term preservation of and access to electronic records (Section II.A.)
- Endorses the "Century of Lawmaking Project" of the Law Library of Congress (Section VI.E.)
- Encourages the continued development of document type definitions (DTDs) for legislative documents, and of extensible markup language (XML) for data exchange throughout the Legislative Branch and as a means for preserving Congress' electronic records (Sections II.C., D., E., F.)
- Endorses the development of Congressional Oral History Projects by archival institutions for purposes of documentation and collections development (Section I.C.)

To provide better and easier access to congressional archival sources which reside in Washington D.C. at the Center for Legislative Archives and in hundreds of research institutions around the country, the committee:

- Encourages the on-line publication of finding aids for congressional papers and Center for Legislative Archives holdings (Sections VI.A., C.)
- Recommends that the Center for Legislative Archives and repositories in the states continue to add appropriate links to each other's holdings on their home pages (Section VI.G.)
- Encourages the development and expansion of on-line information about Congress particularly by including archival documents and data bases of high research interest (Sections VI.E., F., G.)
- Encourages the development and expansion of on-line exhibits by the National Archives, the Congressional Visitors Center, the Library of Congress, and other archival repositories and Centers that focus on the history of Congress (Section VII.A.)
- Encourages the development and expansion of on-line teaching aids by the National Archives and other repositories and Centers that focus on the history of Congress (Sections VI. G.; VII.B.)
- Recommends that the Center for Legislative Archives vigorously continue to process records for declassification review in response to congressional directives (Section VI.B.)
- Endorses educational publications that foster a better understanding of Congress and the legislative process (Section VII.B.)